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By ROBERT PIERCE

- Daily Leader

Washington Elementary met Adequate Yearly Progress standards in math with a score of 79.4 percent in 2009, slightly above the state target of 77.8.

The school missed the goal in reading, with a score of 73.5 percent, compared to 79.7 for the state. The school, however, made AYP in that number through safe harbor because it showed a significant improvement in that category (the school scored 68.8 percent in reading for 2008) for the year.

Current Washington Principal John Jones said the school has continued using some of the techniques used by former principal Gilberto Rito.

“About the last hour of the day, for a good 30 to 40 minutes, we have the kids broken into smaller groups,” he said. “We have other teachers coming in and helping to work with those kids in those small groups to address some of those issues.”

Jones said educator in particular work with third graders, who are the only grade taking the assessments in elementary.

“They are targeting those particular items that they need to work towards improvement in,” he said. “We’ll have other people to help, but the teachers are going to work specifically with those lower kids and try to bring them up. They do two days a week in math and two days a week in reading working in both areas.”

Jones said Washington uses online formative tests with Kansas Computer Assessments.

“They’re basically practice tests for the state assessments that the teachers do,” he said. “We have those scheduled out. We started last month, and we’re still doing that this month. We’ll continue to do that a couple times a week right up until we test.”

The school is working specifically on its reading area with Literacy First, which Jones said is very intensive.

“It’s very well structured toward specific areas of weakness of the kids through assessments that they do,” he said. “They break the kids into small groups and work with them in those small groups on those specific areas that they have deficiency in.”

Jones said Washington teachers feel Literacy First will make a difference.

“It may not so much this year, but as everybody’s doing it, they’re going to build upon it year to year to where you’re going to find those holes where kids have weaknesses and you can address those specific things,” he said.

State standards are scheduled to rise each year, with AYP levels set to reach 100 percent in 2014. Jones said this adds to the difficulties of trying to meet goals.

“In reading, we’ve got to have 83.7 percent of our kids meet standards (for 2010),” he said. “In mathematics, 82.3 percent of the kids have to meet standards to be considered sufficient. It’s difficult.”

Jones has served as a principal in another district with a high level of second language learners. He said Washington’s population of such students is even higher, and for those kids, this makes it even tougher to meet standards.

“We feel like we’re doing everything we can to try to get that,” he said. “Unfortunately, the whole thing with No Child Left Behind, my feeling is at some point, you’re not going to make the score because they keep raising it. It’s not realistic in my opinion.”

All of Liberal’s elementary schools met AYP for 2009, while intermediate, middle and high schools did not. Jones, who has been in education for 30 years, 16 as a principal, said he feels one reason for this is elementary students are easier to motivate.

“A lot of times, with the state assessments, we’ll grant little awards to where if you do so well, we’ll give you this,” he said. “That item, that reward might be something as simple as an extra 15-minute recess. Kids get pretty excited over small things. I think in the long run, it’s really easier to motivate younger kids.”

Jones said schools can use all kinds of rewards systems, such as extra recess, special trips, bowling and movies.

“I think with older kids, it’s just a little tougher to get them fired up about that,” he said. “With the young kids, personally, I think it’s pretty easy to motivate them.”

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